

Key Land Use Statistics

Total Land Area: 17,765 acres
Developed Land, 1999: 5,614 acres
Undeveloped Land, 1999: 12,151 acres

Note on maps: The maps in this chapter are not to scale. They have been adjusted to fit the format and page size of this document.

The Town of Amherst maintains a Geographic Information System (GIS) to meet the ever-increasing needs of departments, boards, committees, professionals and citizens access to a comprehensive set of interconnected databases and mapping resources.

The Land Cover map (Map 6.4) is based on statewide data generated from aerial photography. The remaining maps in this chapter utilize data gathered by the Town, unless otherwise specified.

6. PLACE: BUILT ENVIRONMENT – LAND USE

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides information on Amherst's built environment by presenting a summary of the existing general land use characteristics. These characteristics provide insight into the historical development of the Town, the current use of land in the community, and the existing zoning that guides the future location, pattern, and form of the built environment. Following this overview the chapter is divided into two sections:

- **Key Findings** – The key findings represent a summary of important conclusions drawn by the consulting team based on research and discussions with the CPC and Town Staff.
- **Detailed Information** – This section provides background documentation for the key findings.

The primary sources of information used to prepare this analysis are maps and data generated by the Town of Amherst's Geographic Information System (GIS), as well as the Town's existing plans and studies.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The planning area includes the entire land area of the Town of Amherst – 27.8 square miles located in Hampshire County.
2. Building and development in Amherst have historically been focused in the Town center or village centers that were separated by farms and open land, and along the main transportation corridors connecting the centers. The 1960s brought a new pattern of development with residential subdivisions spreading across available open land. Most recently, new construction has been in areas within or contiguous to this existing development.
3. In recent years, Amherst has been developing relatively more land area to accommodate new residents. Dwelling units and building lots are larger than in the past—each new home consumes more open land.
4. Permits for residential buildings have predominantly been for single-family dwellings. Residential construction has continued even as the population of the Town declined.
5. A significant portion of Amherst’s land cover is open space (>50%), residential land accounts for 23 percent, while commercial areas comprise one percent.
6. Approximately 68 percent of the Town’s land is protected from development. A very significant percentage (43%) of all land is permanently protected.
7. Combined, Amherst’s three higher education institutions account for 15.7 percent of the land in the Town.
8. Currently, nearly 18 percent of Town land is protected agricultural land.
9. Approximately 18 percent of the Town’s land is in conservation.
10. The Town owns 1.4 percent of Amherst’s land, the bulk of which (66 percent) is held by the Conservation Commission.
11. Amherst’s Zoning Bylaw and Map include a number of progressive regulations, but its basic form is essentially unchanged since the mid-1970s. Many of the more recent provisions have been ‘stop-gap’ measures intended to provide short-term relief from the internal contradictions in the zoning regulations and mapping, caused by the growing gap between the regulations and community needs and desires.
12. Amherst’s principal tool for managing growth has been 40 years of an aggressive conservation land acquisition program, resulting in Town ownership of over 1,700 acres of open space, and other development limitations of other kinds on an equivalent additional area.
13. The Town has a relatively small amount of land (633 acres, or 3.6%) designated as commercial, retail, or industrial zones.
14. Early development in the Town, as well as planning studies as far back as the 1970s emphasize the desirability of reinforcing the traditional village center development pattern, but full realization of strong, functional village centers has been hindered by outdated zoning regulations.

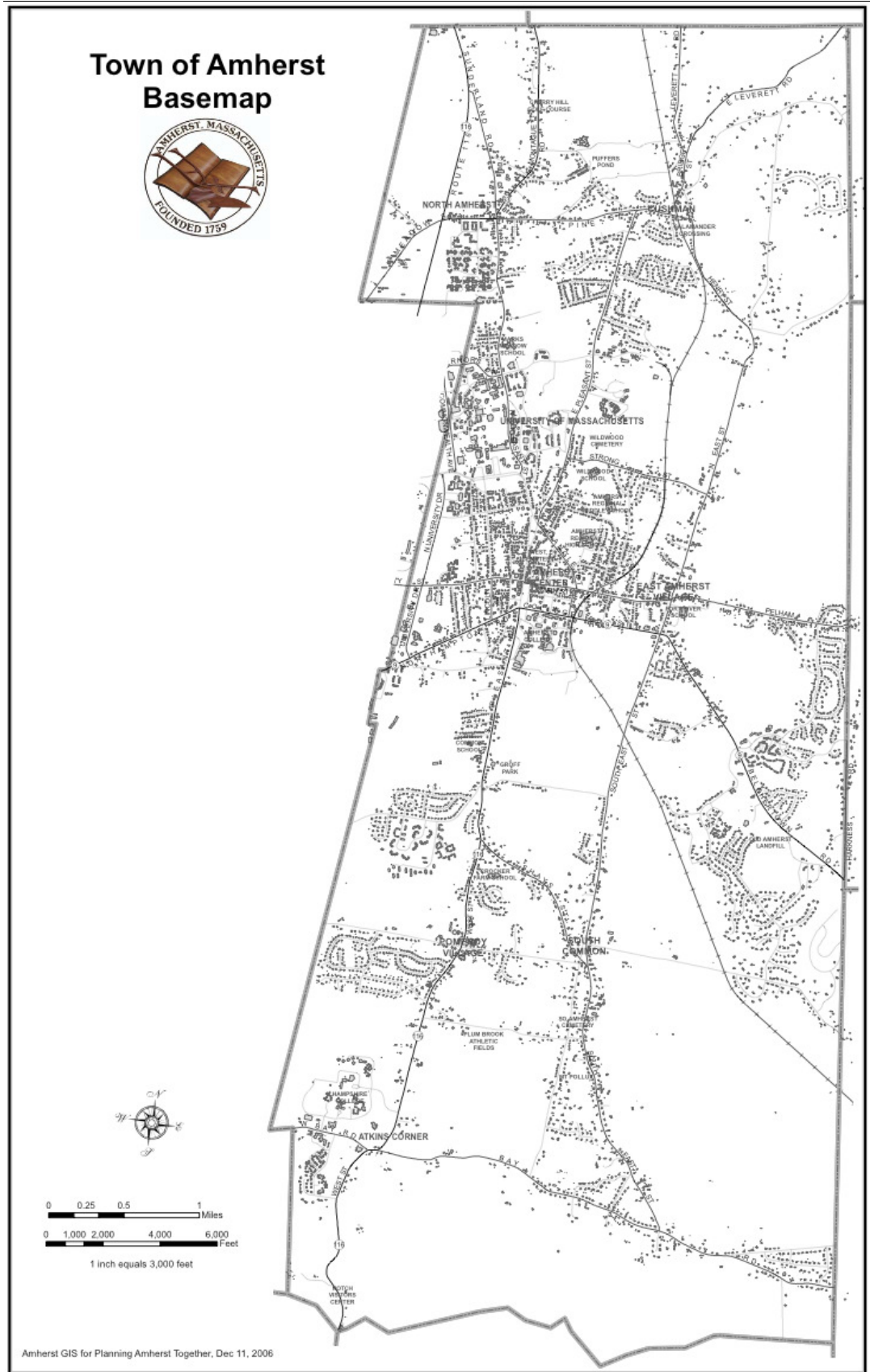
15. Professional Research Parks (PRP) were initially intended to promote clean industry in the Town, but their success has been hindered due to site constraints, changing market conditions, unrealistic and obstructive regulations, and citizen opposition to change.
16. Amherst's community character can be described in terms of seven distinctive "character areas" – Town Center, Village Center, General Neighborhood, Village Neighborhood, Suburban, Semi-Rural, Corridor, and Special District.

DETAILED INFORMATION

The planning area includes the entire land area of the Town of Amherst – 27.8 square miles located in Hampshire County.

Map 6.1, Town of Amherst Base Map, on the following page depicts the planning area being addressed by the Master Plan. The Planning Area is a total of 17,765 acres (27.8 square miles) located in the Connecticut River Valley. It is part of Hampshire County and within the Springfield Metro Area.

MAP 6.1: TOWN OF AMHERST BASE MAP



Source: Town of Amherst

History and the Physical Environment

The *Amherst Preservation Plan* provides an excellent description of how the Town's history has impacted its physical development. Below is an excerpt from the Plan.

"From its earliest days of European settlement, Amherst took the form of a town with several villages, separated by open farms and forests, and this pattern has endured. The largest village – Downtown Amherst – lies at the center of the Town, and smaller clusters stand to the east (East Village), south (South Amherst), north (North Amherst and Cushman Villages), and west (West End). Downtown holds the greatest concentration of commercial activity, with smaller centers in some of the villages. "Strip" development has grown up along Routes 9 (College Avenue and Northampton Streets), and 116 (in North Amherst and at the intersection with Pomeroy Lane). Amherst has attempted to retain its historic pattern by clustering new housing in and around the villages and preserving much of the farmland and conservation lands that lie between them."

Amherst Preservation Plan, pages 2-3

Building and development in Amherst have historically been focused in the Town center or village centers that were separated by farms and open land, and along the main transportation corridors connecting the centers. The 1960s brought a new pattern of development with residential subdivisions spreading across available open land. Most recently, new construction has been in areas within or contiguous to this existing development.

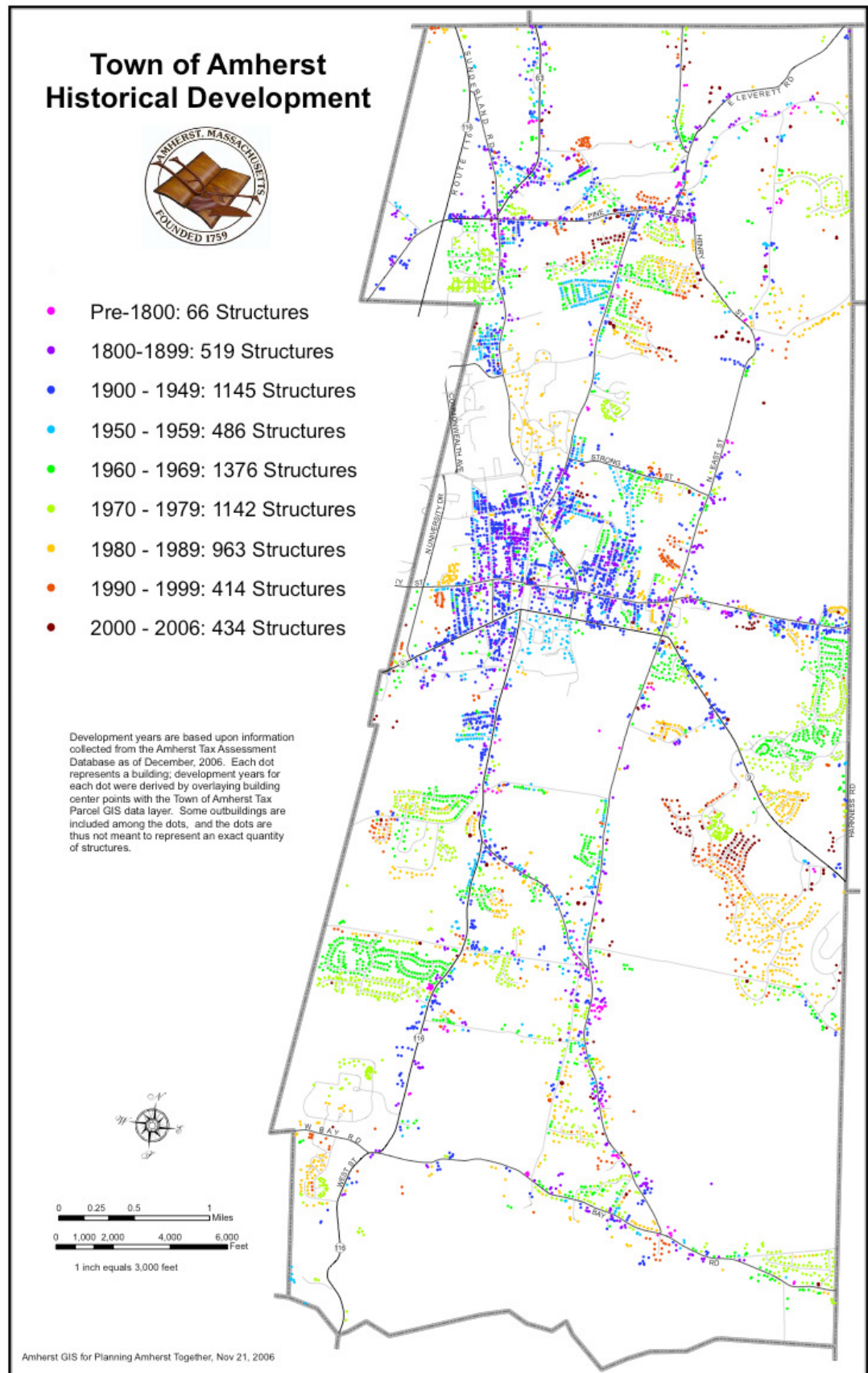
The Historical Development Map provides great insight into how the physical form of the community has evolved since 1800 (See Map 6.2 on the next page.) Early settlement of the Town took place along the main transportation corridors, with an emphasis on development in the Town and village centers. These grew up at major crossroads (East Amherst, Town center, South Amherst), at small river crossings with available water power for mills (North Amherst, Cushman Village, East Village), and in locations central to farming. Development in the first half of the 1900s generally followed this pattern, with more substantial development of the Town center.

In the 1960s, Amherst experienced the single largest increase in population with the addition of over 12,000 new residents, which brought about a new pattern of development. Rather than building along existing roadways, land was developed as subdivisions and apartment complexes in available outlying land, often displacing farmland. New roads were built within developments to service the individual residential areas. Most of these developments were connected to the existing road network at a limited number of access points. The 1960s and 1970s saw the greatest expansion of land development in the community's history, largely in response to the rapid expansion of the University of Massachusetts.

Although much of the lowest density residential development took place in the 1980s, there were a few relatively large subdivision developments. Since that time much of the recent development has been a process of building in areas contiguous to or within existing outlying development.

The section on zoning later in this chapter describes the regulatory environment that has helped to guide the pattern of development since zoning regulations were originally adopted in 1925.

MAP 6.2: TOWN OF AMHERST HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT MAP



Source: Town of Amherst

In recent years, Amherst has been developing relatively more land area to accommodate new residents. Dwelling units and building lots are larger than in the past – each new home consumes more open land.

Table 6.1, Land Development Trends, provides key figures related to developed versus undeveloped land in the Town and residential acreage. Table 6.2 presents percentage change for the figures. There has been a trend toward developing more residential land to accommodate population.

Between 1971 and 1999 the population of the Town grew 32 percent and the amount of developed land grew by the same amount, suggesting that the development was proportional to population growth. But development of land for residential use in Amherst since 2000 has outpaced population growth with an increase of 43 percent versus 32 percent for population. The amount of land area ‘developed’ in residential lots of larger than ½ acre grew by 65 percent in the same period.

These trends nonetheless differ significantly from the trend in the Pioneer Valley as a whole, where population grew six percent, developed land grew 37 percent, and residential land grew by 45 percent. Because of its aggressive program of land acquisition and relatively stringent development regulations, Amherst has managed to limit the amount and area of land developed to accommodate population growth to a much greater degree than the region. It maintained the same ratio of population to developed land in 1971 as in 1999 (6.2 persons per acre). This is a remarkable achievement during a period when communities across the nation have been developing land at a much faster pace than their populations have grown. However, land acquisition and stringent regulations have not been without their own negative impacts. They have contributed to increased land costs and have skewed the balance of land use in the community.

The composition of developed land in Amherst is changing as residential uses have grown at greater rate than population, meaning that other uses (such as commercial), now occupy a smaller share of the developed land in the Town, with residential uses occupying a larger portion than in the past.

TABLE 6.1: LAND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Land	1971	1985	1999
Developed Land (acres)	4,247.7	4,932.6	5,613.9
Undeveloped Land (acres)	13,517.3	12,832.4	12,151.1
Percent Developed	23.9 %	27.8 %	31.6 %
Residential (acres)	2,801.5	N/A	4,001.1
Residential Acres larger than 1/2 acre lots	786.3	N/A	1,298.97
Population	1970 Census 26,331	N/A	2000 Census 34,874
Persons per Acre of Developed Land (approximate)	6.2	N/A	6.2
Persons per Acre of Residential Land (approximate)	9.4	N/A	8.7
Acres of Larger than 1/2 Acre Residential Lots per Person	33.48	N/A	26.84

Source: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

TABLE 6.2: LAND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS, PERCENTAGE CHANGE

Percent Change	Amherst	Pioneer Valley
Acres of Developed Land	32.20%	37.30%
Acres of Residential Land	42.80%	45.40%
Acres of Larger than 1/2 Acre Lot Residential Land	65.20%	77.10%

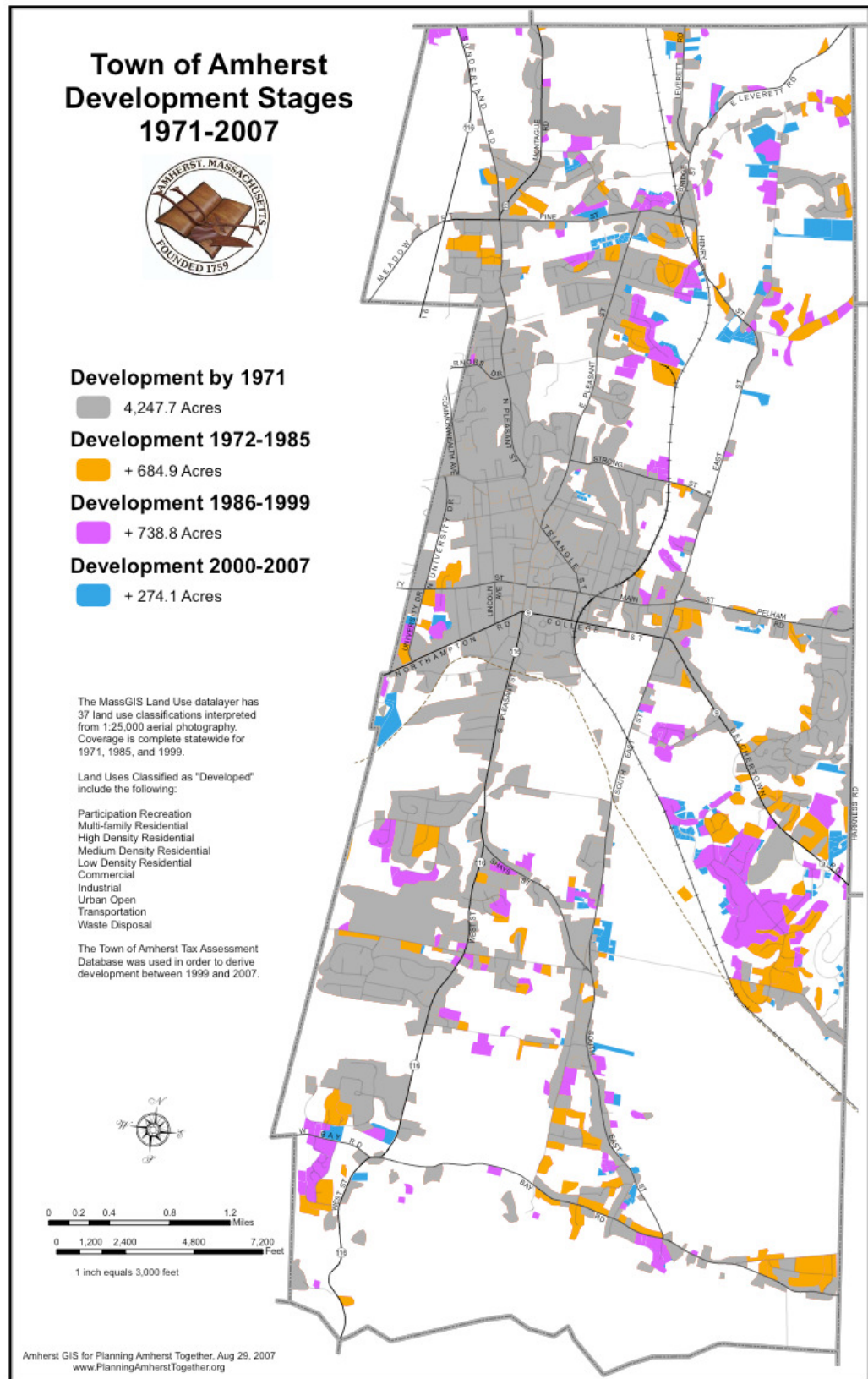
Source: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

The Town of Amherst Historical Development Trends Map, Map 6.3, on the following page depicts the “footprint” of developed land in the Town. The baseline year is 1971 and portrays all areas in the Town that were developed by that year, but does not distinguish the particular use (e.g. residential, commercial, etc). The data is based on the State’s land cover data derived from aerial photography. The “footprint” is then expanded based on the State’s land cover data for 1985 and 1999. The Town then used Assessor’s data to update the map for the year 2007.

The map depicts the development “footprint” for the following four periods:

- Development by 1971
- Development 1972-1985
- Development 1986-1999
- Development 2000-2006

MAP 6.3: TOWN OF AMHERST HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT TRENDS



Source: Town of Amherst

Permits for residential building have predominantly been for single-family dwellings. Residential construction has continued even as the population of the Town declined.

Table 6.3 below presents information on residential building permits issued for new construction between 1995-1999 and 2000-2006. In both periods, most residential building permits (92%) issued by the Town were for single family dwellings. On average, 34 to 35 permits were issued per year for new construction. Multi-family permits were relatively few due to a variety of factors, including severe limits on areas in which multi-family development is permitted, high land costs, and organized opposition from neighborhood groups.

Note that the number of permits does not indicate the number of housing units created for multi-family dwellings or dorm/rooming house/motels. Regardless of the actual number of housing units generated by new construction, it is important to note that construction of residential units continued even during a period when the Town's population declined (a reduction of 354 residents between 1990-2000.)

Table 6.3: Residential Building Permits for New Construction Issued, 1995-1999 and 2000-2006

Residential Type	New Construction (1995-1999)	Average/Year	New Construction (2000-2006)	Average/Year
Dorm/Rooming House/Motels	6	1.20	6	0.86
Single Family Dwelling	162	32.40	213	30.43
2 Family Dwelling	1	0.20	11	1.57
Multi Family Dwelling	5	1.00	5	0.71
Total	174	34.80	235	33.57

Source: Town of Amherst

A significant portion of Amherst's land cover is open space (>50%), residential land accounts for 23 percent, while commercial areas comprise one percent.

Table 6.4 presents the acreage by land cover category. Figure 6.1 presents land cover acreage for aggregated categories. For example, in Table 6.4 four different residential categories are listed. They are aggregated as one residential land cover category in Figure 6.1.

In 1999, residential land accounted for 4,001 acres, 22.5 percent of the land in Amherst. The largest portion of residential land is used for medium density residential at 2,250 acres, 56 percent of all residential land. Low-density residential uses almost half as much land at 1,299 acres. Interestingly, much of the low-density residential areas were developed in the 1980s. Multi-family housing accounts for 393 acres and is relatively evenly distributed throughout the Town.

Over 50 percent of the Town's land can be considered open space. This includes forest, non-forested wetlands, open land, urban open space, and woody perennial. Urban open space, which includes portions of the UMass and college campuses and is included in the figure above, accounts for 893 acres. Although there are wooded areas throughout the community, the

largest contiguous areas run along the eastern and southern edges of the Town. Cropland and pasture are 19.8 percent of the Town's land. These are concentrated in blocks in the eastern, southern, and northwestern areas of the Town. In many parts of the Town, agricultural lands and forests are fronted by residential land along the roadways.

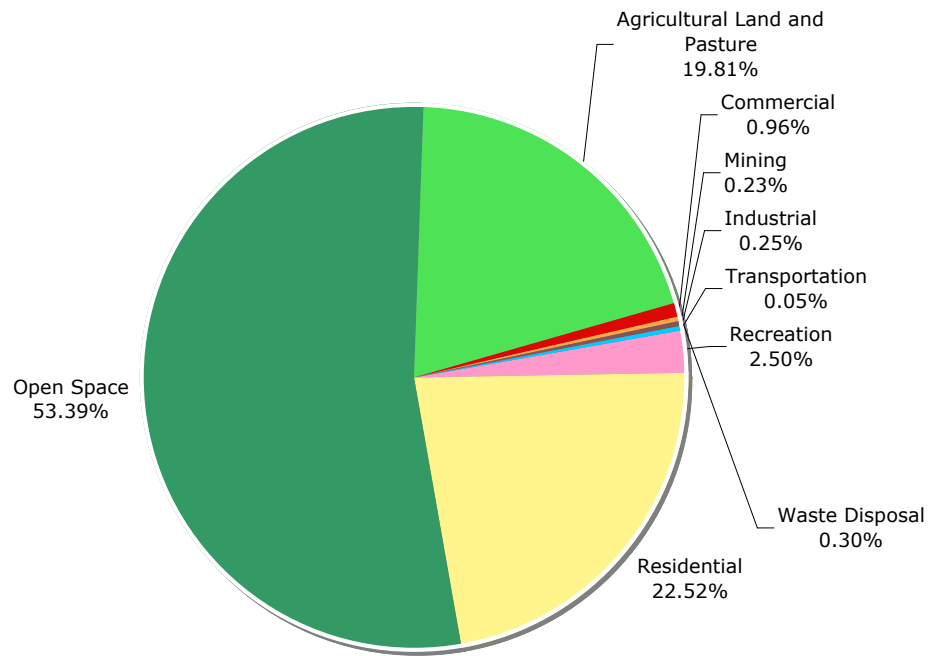
Land used specifically for economic purposes, aside from active agriculture – commerce, mining, or industry, accounts for only 1.5 percent of the total land in the Town. Commercial land is 170 acres or 1.0 percent of the land area.

Table 6.4: Town of Amherst 1999 Land Cover

Code	Category	Definition	Acres
1	Cropland	Intensive agriculture	2,566
2	Pasture	Extensive agriculture	953
3	Forest	Forest	7,591
4	Wetland	Nonforested freshwater wetland	116
5	Mining	Sand; gravel & rock	41
6	Open Land	Abandoned agriculture; power lines; areas of no vegetation	691
7	Participation Recreation	Golf; tennis; Playgrounds; skiing	439
8	Spectator Recreation	Stadiums; racetracks; Fairgrounds; drive-ins	0
9	Water Based Recreation	Beaches; marinas; Swimming pools	5
10	Residential	Multi-family	393
11	Residential	Smaller than 1/4 acre lots	59
12	Residential	1/4 - 1/2 acre lots	2,250
13	Residential	Larger than 1/2 acre lots	1,299
14	Salt Wetland	Salt marsh	0
15	Commercial	General urban; shopping center	170
16	Industrial	Light & heavy industry	45
17	Urban Open	Parks; cemeteries; public & institutional greenspace; also vacant undeveloped land	893
18	Transportation	Airports; docks; divided highway; freight; storage; railroads	8
19	Waste Disposal	Landfills; sewage lagoons	54
20	Water	Fresh water; coastal embayment	49
21	Woody Perennial	Orchard; nursery; cranberry bog	145

Source: MassGIS Land Use datalayer

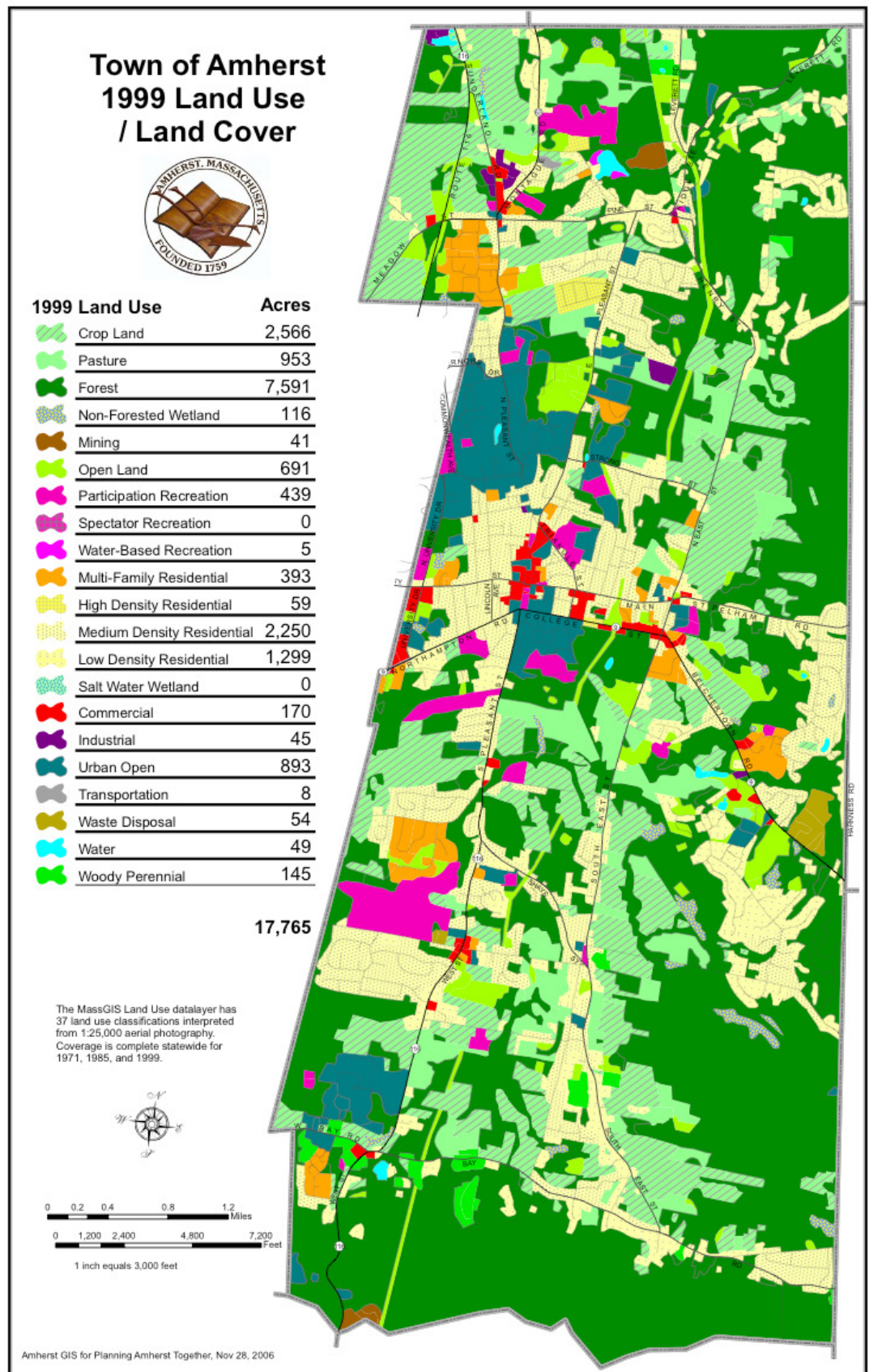
FIGURE 6.1: AGGREGATED LAND COVER, 1999



Source: MassGIS Land Use datalayer

On the following page Map 6.4, Town of Amherst 1999 Land Cover, depicts how land is used in the Town. The statewide data has 37 land use classifications interpreted from aerial photography. Coverage is complete statewide for 1971, 1985, and 1999.

MAP 6.4: TOWN OF AMHERST LAND COVER



Source: Town of Amherst

Note on Permanently Protected Lands:

These include Town Conservation areas, APR land, State land, etc. These lands technically could be sold or used for other purposes, but the likelihood due to regulatory, financial, or political obstacles is highly improbable.

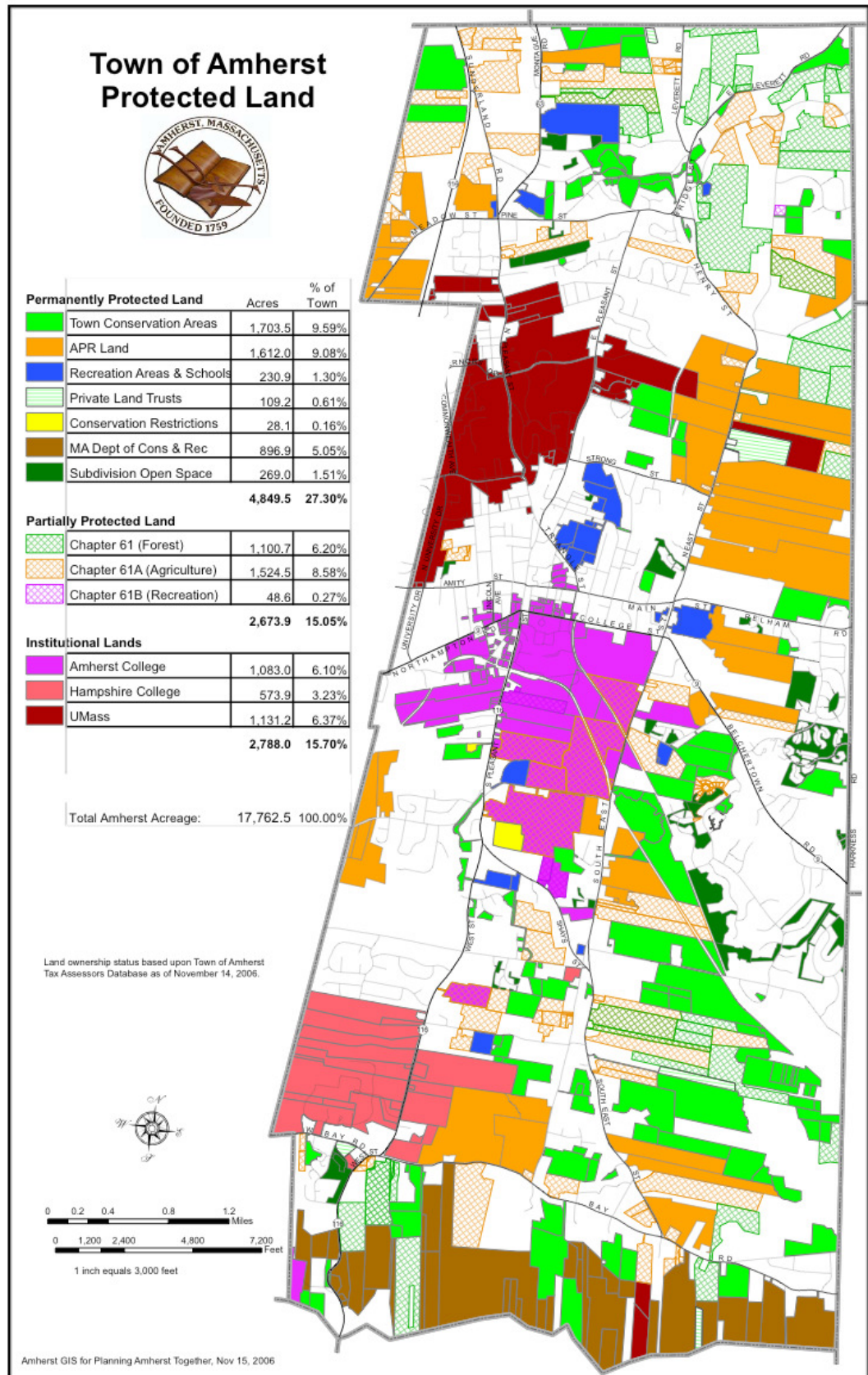
Approximately 68 percent of the Town's land is protected from development. A very significant percentage (43%) of all land is permanently protected.

Amherst's history and culture have greatly impacted the type and amount of protected land in the community. Approximately 43 percent (7,638 acres) of the land in the Town is protected in perpetuity (see sidebar). In addition, there are 2,674 acres of partially protected lands. This dynamic has numerous impacts on the community. For many it contributes to Amherst's quality of life and represents the importance residents place on open space protection, the agricultural heritage of the Town, education, and recreation.

There are different categories of permanently protected land. The institutional land holdings, accounting for 15 percent of Town land, are discussed in the following section. Other categories of permanently protected land account for 27 percent of land. Map 6.5 on the next page provides a comprehensive listing of each land use category, the total acreage, and percent of the Town's land. With 1,703 acres, Town conservation areas account for the largest share (9.6 percent) of protected land in the community, greater than any of the individual educational institutions. APR (Agricultural Preservation Restriction) land is the next largest at nine percent. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation accounts for another five percent of Town land.

In addition to the permanently protected land, there are substantial holdings in partially protected land. A total of 15 percent (2,683 acres) are in partial protection for forest, agriculture, or recreation (Chapters 61, 61A, and 61B). These lands are not permanently protected and could at some point in the future be converted to a different land use. However, many other areas of the community are effectively protected from development by man-made barriers (such as railroad lines) natural barriers (e.g. lakes, rivers, steep slopes) and related prohibitive regulation (e.g., wetlands, river corridors, floodplains, etc.) In sum, approximately 12,000 acres in Amherst have some type of protection from development. This represents 68 percent of the Town's total land area.

MAP 6.5: TOWN OF AMHERST PROTECTED LAND



Source: Town of Amherst

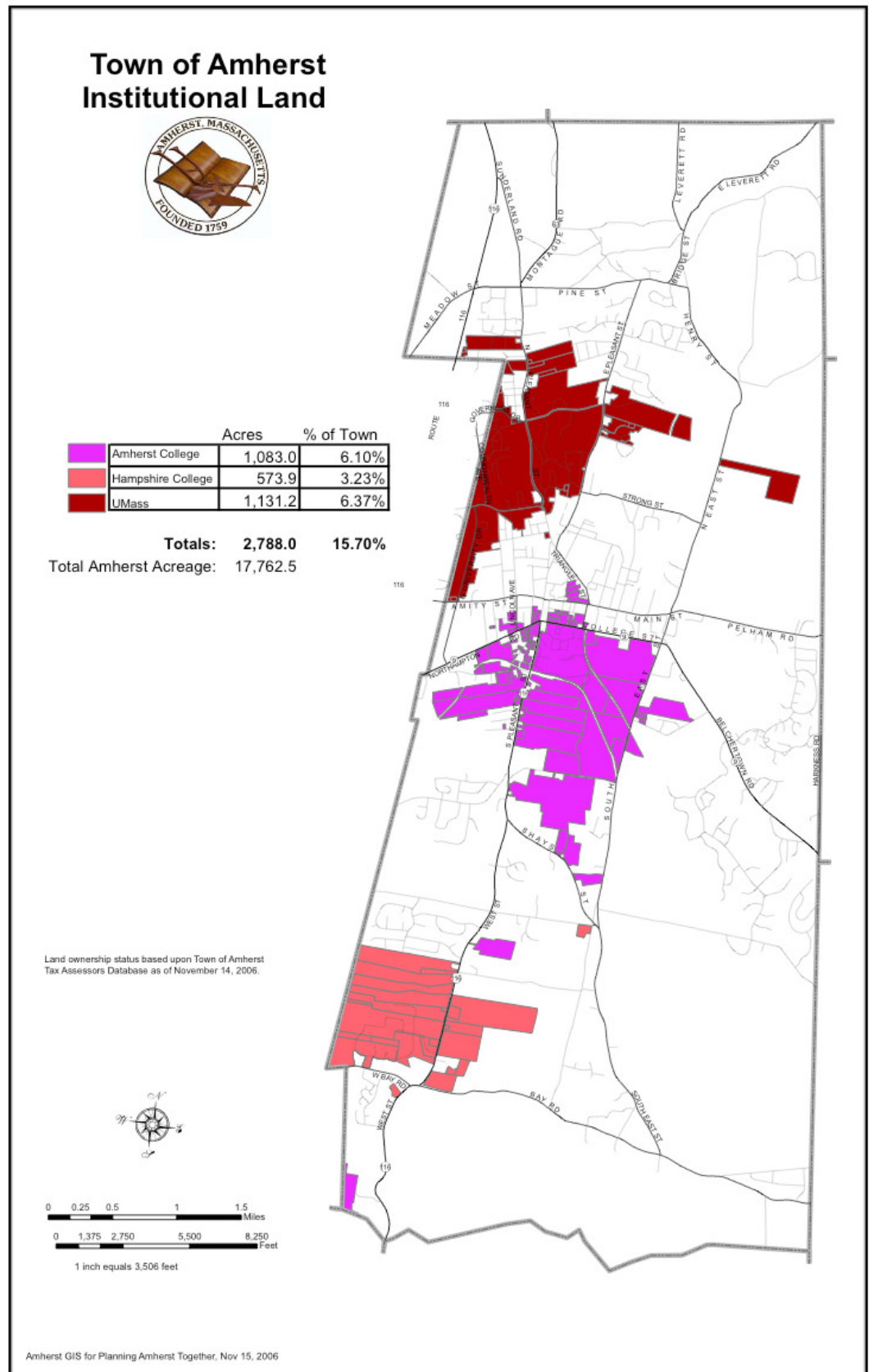
Combined, Amherst's three higher education institutions account for 15.7 percent of the land in the Town.

Amherst's logo is the book and the plough, representing the Town's two main historic industries: education and agriculture. There are three institutions of higher education: Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (UMass). Higher education has a great impact in a variety of different ways including population, economy, and culture. It also has an important impact on the land use and character of the Town. According to the Town's Tax Assessor's Office, these institutions hold 2,788 acres of the 17,763 total acres in the Town. Combined they account for 15.7 percent of the Town's land area.

On the next page, Map 6.6 displays the institutional land in the Town. UMass is the largest institutional landholder with 1,131 acres, accounting for 6.4 percent of the Town's land. UMass is located toward the northwest portion of the Town. This does not include all of UMass's land holdings; portions of the campus are located in towns adjacent to Amherst. Amherst College with 1,083 acres – only 48 acres fewer than UMass – accounts for 6.1 percent of the Town's land area. Amherst College is located in the center of the Town. Hampshire College is about half as large as Amherst College with 574 acres, accounting for 3.2 percent of Town land. Hampshire College is located in the southwest corner of the Town.

Although nearly 16 percent of the Town's land is owned by one of the three major educational institutions in the community, these lands are used for a variety of purposes. Portions of the institutional lands are campuses, of course (identified as urban open land on the Land Use/Land Cover Map, Map 6.4), but other areas owned by these institutions are classified as open land, cropland, forest, or residential.

MAP 6.6: TOWN OF AMHERST INSTITUTIONAL LAND



Source: Town of Amherst

Currently, nearly 18 percent of Town land is protected agricultural land.

Permanently protected APR land accounts for 9 percent (1,704 acres). Due to restrictions on these lands they will likely remain undeveloped in perpetuity. Partially protected land, which could be used for other purposes at some point in the future, accounts for 8.6 percent (1,525 acres). Taken together, nearly 18 percent of Amherst's land is protected agricultural land. The largest concentration of permanently protected agricultural land is located in the central northeast of the Town north of Pelham Road along North East Street. A farmland block of similar size is predominantly protected in the southeast corner of the Town east of South East Street. While there is some APR ownership in this area, farm properties located there are more often protected through Town conservation or water department ownership or through stringent wetland, floodplain, and other environmental regulations as part of the aquifer recharge area for Town public water supply wells in and around Lawrence Swamp. The remaining farm parcels are in small concentrations scattered in different parts of the Town. Partially protected agricultural lands are also scattered throughout the Town.

Approximately 18 percent of the Town's land is in conservation.

Both the Town and State of Massachusetts own substantial conservation and recreational land in Amherst. The Town's conservation areas total 1,704 acres and the State's total 897 acres. Combined they account for 14.6 percent of the Town's land. In addition, there are recreation areas and schools (231 acres), conservation restrictions (28 acres), and subdivision open space (269 acres), which comprise an additional 3.6 percent of Town land. These lands are not likely to be used for any other purpose in the immediate future.

The bulk of the Town's conservation areas are concentrated in the area south of Belchertown Road and east of South East Street. The State's conservation and recreation lands are on the Holyoke Range in South Amherst, south of Bay Road to the border with the Town of Granby.

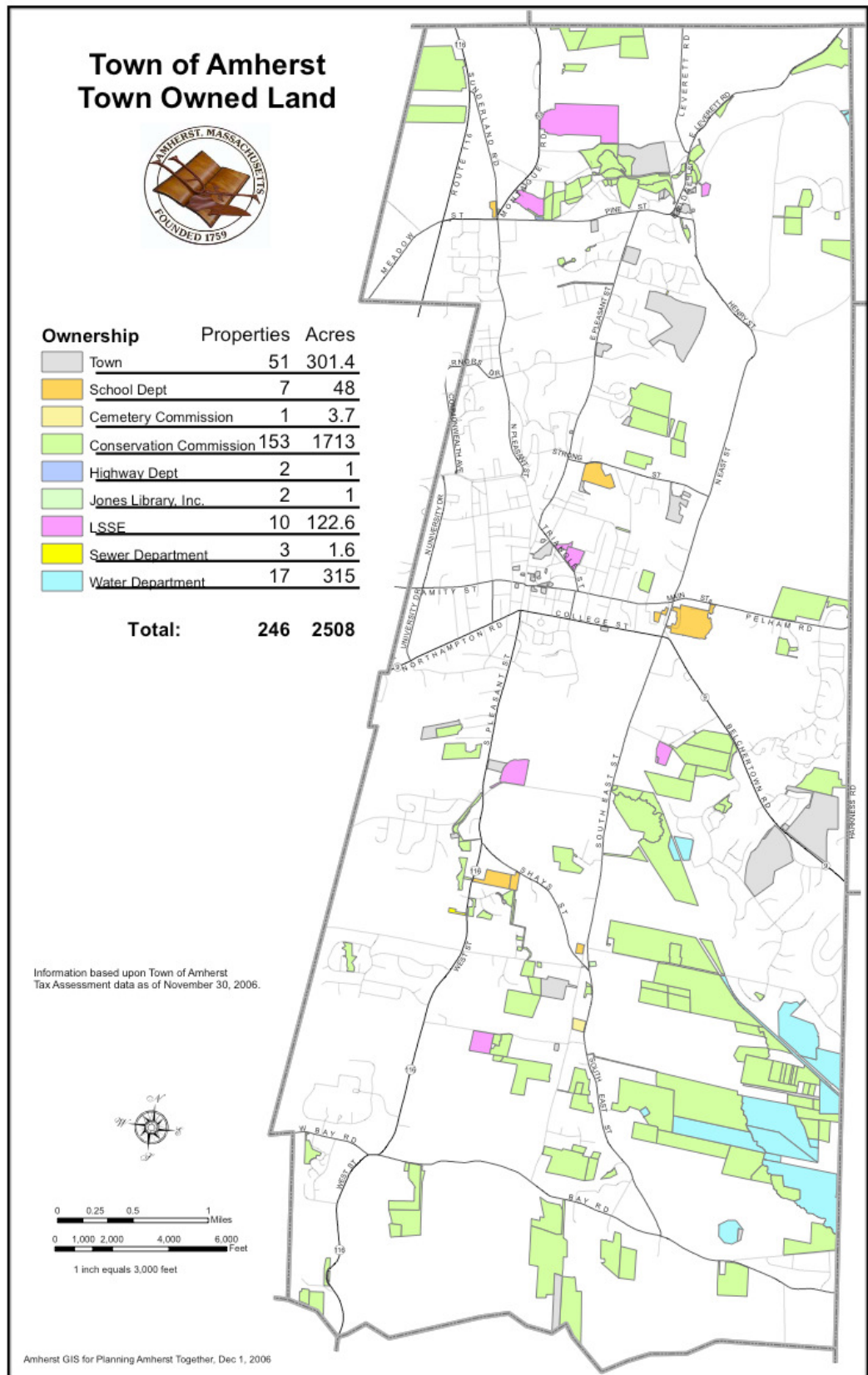
The Town is getting closer to reaching its conservation land acquisition goals. A gradual shift is underway from an emphasis on the acquisition of new lands to increased and improved management of existing preserved lands. Conservation lands in Amherst have an important recreational value for Amherst's citizens, citizens throughout the region, visitors, and tourists. Therefore, management of conservation lands must anticipate and ameliorate the impacts of increased recreational use.

The Town owns 1.4 percent of Amherst's land, the bulk of which (66 percent) is held by the Conservation Commission.

The Town of Amherst owns 2,508 acres of land accounting for 1.4 percent of the Town's land area. The vast majority (66 percent) of the Town's land is held by the Conservation Commission at 1,713 acres. On the next page Map 6.7 illustrates the Town-owned land. The Town's largest holdings are concentrated south of Belchertown Road and east of South East Street, where the majority of conservation areas as well as water department lands are located.

As a consequence of the historic patterns of development and a consistent 40-year program of conservation land planning and land acquisition, Amherst has been successful in preserving significant areas of contiguous parcels of land for conservation, wildlife habitat, water supply purposes, and agricultural purposes.

MAP 6.7: TOWN OF AMHERST TOWN-OWNED LAND



Source: Town of Amherst

Amherst’s Zoning Bylaw and Map include a number of progressive regulations, but its basic form is essentially unchanged since the mid-1970s. Many of the more recent provisions have been ‘stop-gap’ measures intended to provide short-term relief from internal contradictions in the zoning regulations and mapping, caused by the growing gap between the regulations and community needs and desires.

Zoning

Zoning is a tool used to designate ‘zones’ of land area within a community within which different types and combinations of land use—residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, etc.—are regulated differently, depending on where the community wants uses to occur. Zoning regulations are enforced by restrictions on land use types, as well as dimensions, site layout, design, parking, and types of buildings in each zone. Amherst’s Zoning Bylaws were enacted pursuant to, and under the authority of, Chapter 40A of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, for the purpose of promoting the health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the inhabitants of the Town of Amherst.

Amherst first adopted zoning regulations in 1925. Following that, the most comprehensive change in Amherst’s zoning was adopted by Town Meeting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially in 1974, in association with the Select Committee on Goals (SCOG) community planning effort. This plan, and the zoning amendments which accompanied it, represented the community’s strong reactions to the growth and development spurred by the expansion of UMass.

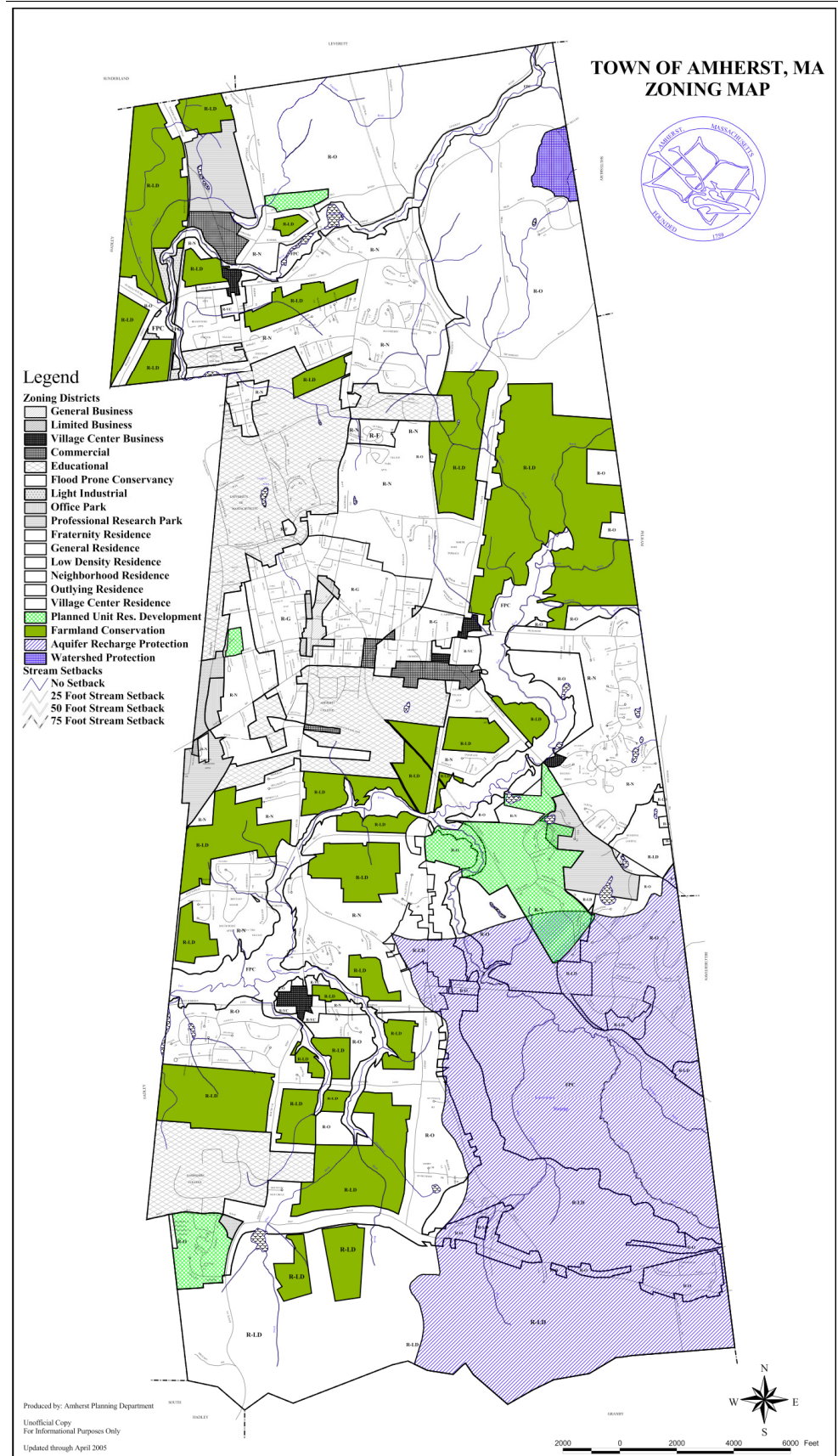
In 1987, facing more than 1,000 new building permit applications, Amherst adopted a two-year moratorium on residential building. This gave the Town time and justification to create new restrictive zoning for areas providing public water supplies (watershed and aquifer recharge protection), remaining open farmland, a number of affordable housing incentives, and a phased growth bylaw to control the rate of new growth.

In fall 2004, Town Meeting amended the phased growth bylaw in response to a Massachusetts court case which had made the use of “growth constraints” like phased growth unconstitutional, put a sunset (fall 2009) on the existing phased growth regulations, and committed the community to completion of a master plan by fall 2009.

In general, while many of the provisions of Amherst’s Zoning Bylaw and Map are highly progressive, the basic assumptions and form of the zoning regulations and mapping, particularly the distribution of basic residential and commercial zoning districts, is essentially unchanged since the mid-1970s. Many of the Bylaw’s more recent provisions have been ‘stop-gap’ measures intended to provide short-term relief from internal contradictions between the zoning regulations and mapping, and the community’s changing needs. An example of such a change was the removal of the outdated and vestigial Wetlands District overlay at the fall 2006 Town Meeting. Amherst’s subdivision regulations are similarly outdated, having been only modestly amended since their creation in 1972. Amherst’s development regulations (e.g., zoning, subdivision, health, environmental, infrastructure, etc.) need to be comprehensively reworked and coordinated to address the current and future needs of the community.

Map 6.8 shows the Town’s current zoning map.

MAP 6.8: TOWN OF AMHERST ZONING MAP



Source: Town of Amherst

Amherst's principal tool for managing growth has been 40 years of an aggressive conservation land acquisition program resulting in Town ownership of over 1,700 acres of open space, and development limitations of other kinds on an equivalent additional area.

The Town's master plan effort was underway when the legal case of *ZUCKERMAN vs. TOWN OF HADLEY* was decided in August 2004. The Hadley case provided a necessary imperative to begin the effort in earnest. The case states that "time limitations on development must be temporary and must be dependent on the completion and implementation of comprehensive planning studies." Based on the language of the Hadley decision, Town Counsel, staff, and Town Meeting strongly believed the phased growth bylaw was unconstitutional as it stood. That problem was temporarily cured by adding a 'sunset' date (November 2009) for the phased growth regulations and committing the Town to develop a master plan under which new regulations would be developed to take the place of phased growth.

The principal tool Amherst has used to manage its growth has been 40 years of an aggressive conservation land acquisition program, resulting in Town ownership of over 1,700 acres of open space, and development limitations of other kinds (APRs, conservation easements) on an equivalent additional area. Amherst's zoning and the phased growth bylaw has been the principal regulatory tool for managing the community's growth. This includes the range of strongly restrictive 1988-90 era zoning protecting critical resource areas and facilitating the critical social need of affordable housing through density bonuses.

The Town has a relatively small amount of land (633 acres, or 3.6%) designated as commercial, retail, or industrial zones.

Amherst has a limited amount of land zoned for commerce, retail, or industrial purposes. Table 6.5 below describes the Town’s business and industrial districts and shows the acreage for each.

Table 6.5: Business and Industrial Districts

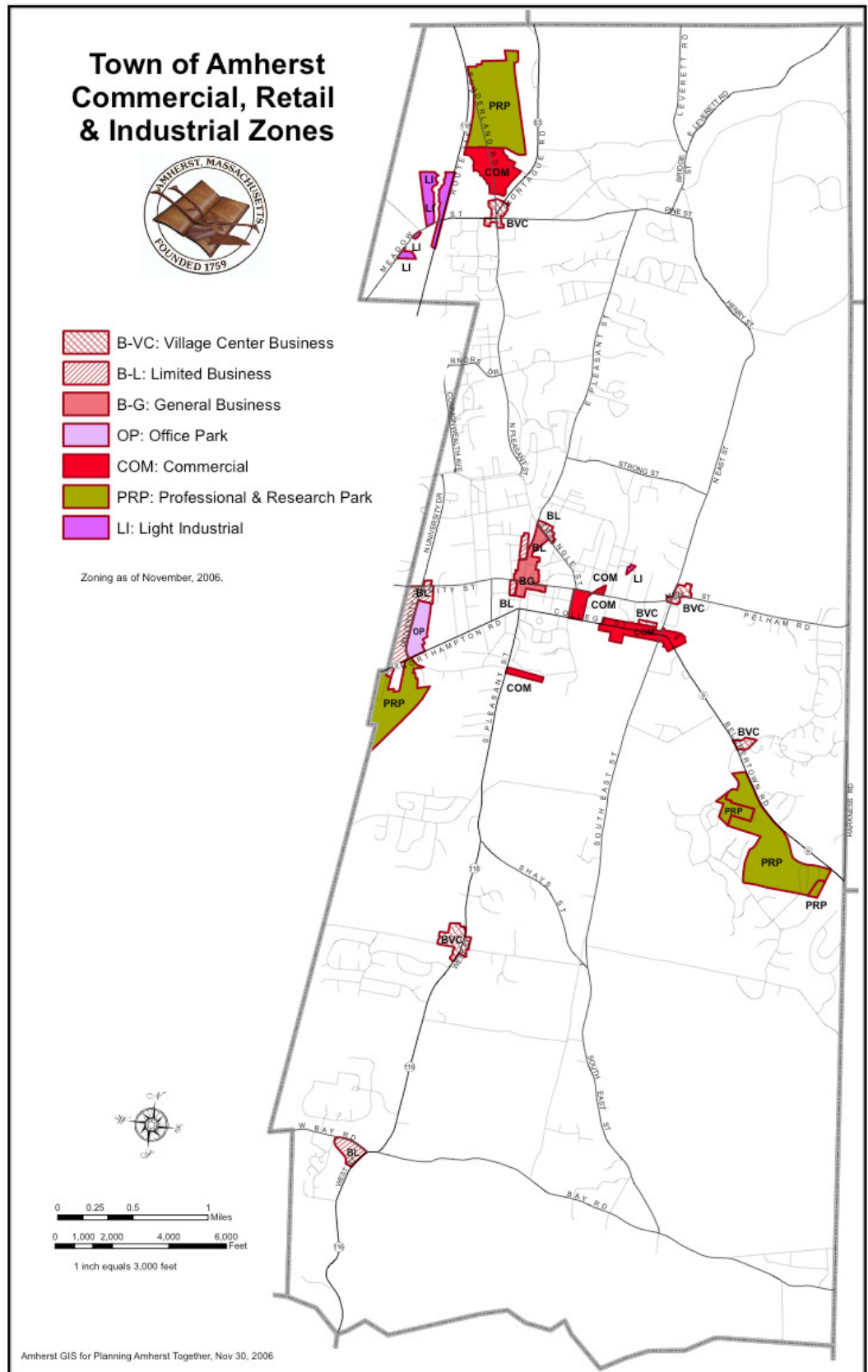
District	Description	Acres
B-VC: Village Center Business	Areas within the village centers of Amherst that allow for a mix of uses, including retail, commercial, office and housing of moderate to high density.	45.8
B-L Limited Business	Areas for moderate density, office, commercial and multifamily developments. Located in transitional areas between high density business districts and high density residential districts or in appropriate areas along arterial or primary roads.	67.3
B-G General Business	A mixed use area of high density within the Town Center containing a wide variety of commercial, office, residential, institutional, civic, and cultural uses.	30.2
OP Office Park	Areas for office and limited research activities. Standards and regulations are intended to limit the types of uses and to provide for a clean, open and quiet environment that will not adversely impact adjoining residential areas.	24.5
COM Commercial	Areas for a wide range of retail uses and services and commercial activities in appropriate locations along primary roads within the Town.	97.3
PRP Professional and Research Park	Provides an open and attractive environment for office, research and low intensity industrial activities. The standards and regulations are intended to limit development to those activities that are non-commercial in nature and that operate in a clean and quiet manner.	331.3
LI Light Industrial	Areas for certain light manufacturing, warehousing, wholesaling and similar activities.	36.4

Source: Town of Amherst

A total of 633 acres are zoned for business or industrial use (about 3.6 percent of the Town’s land area.) Among these zoning districts, the mixed use business districts (B-VC, B-L, B-G) are the most intensively used areas. The Professional and Research Park and Light Industrial districts are notably underused.

Map 6.9 on the next page shows the locations of these districts. It is important to note that this map does not take into account the three large educational institutions in the Town, which are significant components of the Town’s economy, both directly and indirectly.

MAP 6.9: COMMERCIAL, RETAIL, AND INDUSTRIAL ZONES



Source: Town of Amherst

Early development in the Town, as well as planning studies as far back as the 1970s emphasize the desirability of reinforcing the traditional village center development pattern, but full realization of strong, functional village centers has been hindered by outdated zoning regulations.

For many years, there has been an expressed desire to encourage village centers, and select intersections in the community are zoned Village Center Business. With the exception of the Town Center, which has received more consistent attention, especially since 2002, most of Amherst's traditional and new outlying village centers (East Amherst Village, North Amherst Village, Cushman Center, Gatehouse Road, Pomeroy Village, and Atkins Corner) labor under dysfunctional zoning regulations and district boundaries. They have also been largely ignored and neglected in terms of the kinds of capital infrastructure and improvement investments needed to support useful redevelopment.

Professional Research Parks (PRP) were initially intended to promote clean industry in the Town, but their success has been hindered due to site constraints, changing market conditions, unrealistic and obstructive regulations, and citizen opposition to change.

The Town has also sought to encourage clean industry in the community through the Professional and Research Park Zone. There are three such zones in the community at the eastern gateway to town on Belchertown Road, and northwestern gateway on Sunderland Road, and at the western gateway on Northampton Road, where the only zoned office park is also located.

Amherst's professional research parks exist in three places. Of these, only the East Amherst PRP district has both full infrastructure and modest development. The Northampton Road (west Amherst) PRP is mostly developed for other purposes or is landlocked by other uses developed along its frontage. The majority of its land area was lost to a large, grandfathered housing project. The North Amherst PRP has considerable potential but remains undeveloped because the public sewer lines stop 1,800 feet short of the site. All three PRP districts are strongly limited by the presence of wetlands and other site constraints.

The zoning regulations governing PRP areas have been amended several times since their creation in the early 1980s, usually in an attempt to attract or facilitate uses integral to a series of short-term 'visions' for the development of the areas (campus spin-off research parks was the most recent). None of these 'visions' have subsequently had any reality or appeal in the marketplace, and the resulting amended regulations actually prohibit or discourage the uses comprising the real growth industry in Amherst in the PRP District, such as small technical or professional consulting firm offices. Ironically, these uses were actively encouraged as a 'foundation' use by the

original PRP regulations. Three attempts by the Planning Board over a period of five years to amend these obstructive regulations and allow such modest office uses have achieved strong majority votes at Town Meeting but have nonetheless narrowly failed (twice by margins of two votes or less) to achieve the necessary two-thirds super-majority vote, due to persistent opposition by a coalition of residents of the neighborhoods near the PRP districts and local community activists.

Amherst’s community character can be described in terms of seven distinctive “character areas” – Town Center, Village Center, General Neighborhood, Village Neighborhood, Suburban, Semi-Rural, Corridor, and Special District.

Community character refers to the form and pattern of different development conditions in the Town, including neighborhoods, districts, and corridors. The Town of Amherst can be described in terms of seven character areas, which are listed below.

Town Center. This area is centrally located, and offers a vibrant mix of uses including office, commercial, institutional/civic, and some residential. The Town Center has a high intensity of uses, and its buildings create a continuous streetwall. The area is highly walkable due to the compact development pattern and the location of parking (typically on street or in the rear of buildings.) Structures within this area are typically three to four stories.

Village Center. Village Centers are smaller in scale than the Town Center and offer residents access to commercial and civic uses. These areas are located within a walkable distance (one-quarter mile) from residential uses. Structures in the Village Centers are typically one- to two-story buildings.

General Neighborhood. These residential areas of the community feature characteristics of traditional neighborhood development. They consist of detached single-family homes on smaller lots, and may also include some multi-family and mixed-use type developments. General neighborhood areas are walkable, and are often characterized by a discernable center that features a civic use such as park, school, or religious institution.

Village Neighborhood. Village Neighborhoods feature single-family homes on lots similar in size to those found in the General Neighborhood areas. Village Neighborhoods are spread over the community at crossroad locations, and generally are adjacent to or surrounding Village Centers. These are walkable areas, but some lack a complete sidewalk network.

Suburban. Conventional suburban development is characterized by a curvilinear road network, which may include cul-de-sacs. This type of more recent development can be found throughout the community. The curvilinear road pattern reduces the connectivity and accessibility of the road network. The long block lengths and the single use nature of these areas creates an

environment that is less walkable than the General Neighborhood and Village Neighborhood areas.

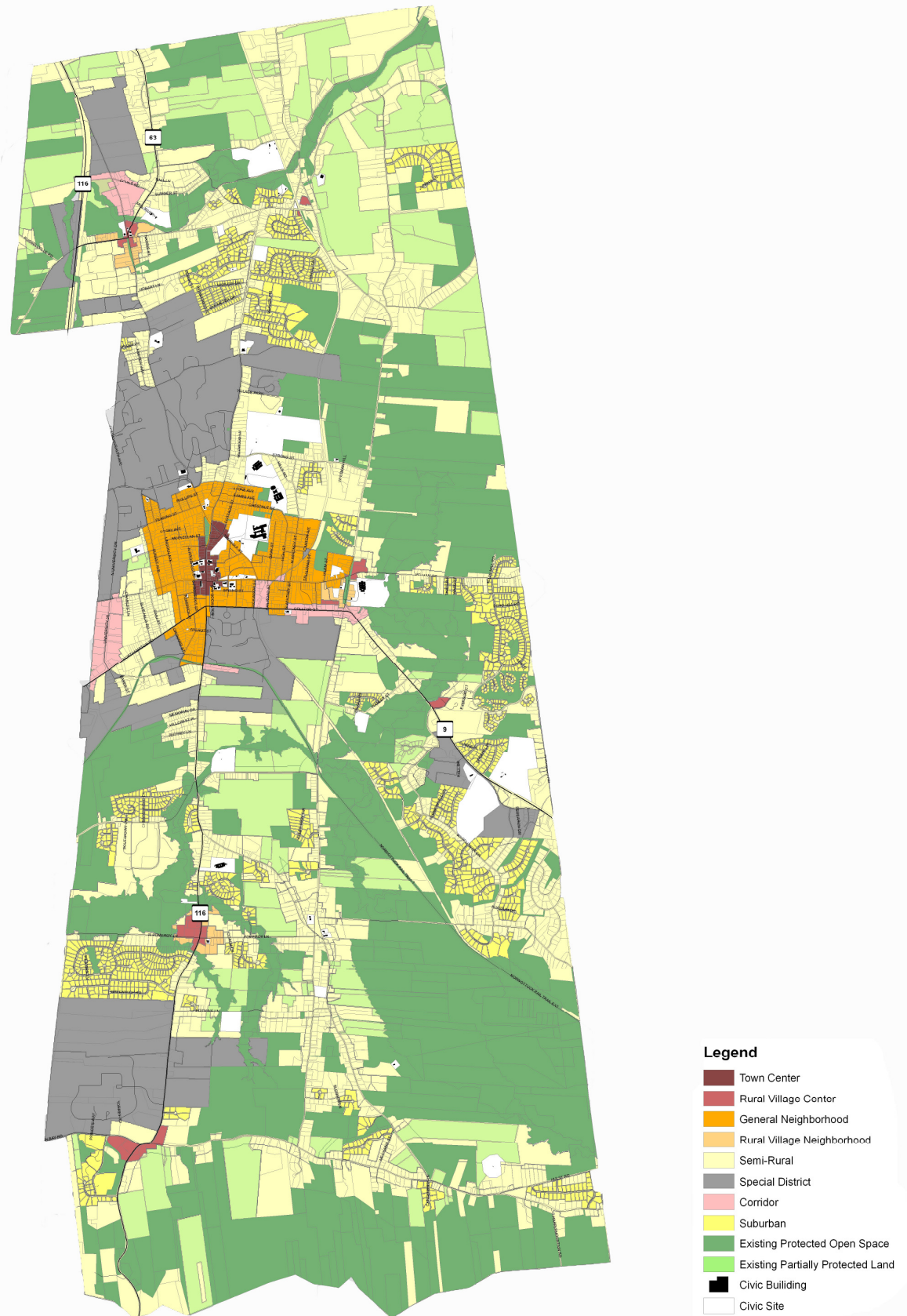
Semi-Rural. These are outlying areas of the community along the older Town roads. They have a rural character and feature both residential and agricultural uses.

Corridor. Corridor areas can be found along arterials or major collectors, and include all the parcels that front the roadway. Corridors generally feature non-residential uses such as commercial and office. Structures are typically large-scale commercial, one to two stories, with large parking lots. These areas are often not pedestrian friendly. They may include sidewalks; however, the auto-oriented nature of the corridors and the amount of traffic from commercial structures create conflict zones for pedestrians.

Special District. These are special use areas dedicated to a specific purpose (such as industry or education). Educational districts, comprised of the campuses of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst College, and Hampshire College, cover a significant portion of the Town's land area. These campus areas tend to be walkable and offer recreational opportunities for students and residents.

On the following page, Map 6.10 shows the locations of these seven character areas.

MAP 6.10 – CHARACTER AREAS



Source: ACP – Visioning & Planning, Ltd.